DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 445 444 EC 308 048

AUTHOR	Roach, Virginia
TITLE	Center for Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform on Student with Disabilities. Final Report.
INSTITUTION	Center for Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform, Alexandria, VA.
SPONS AGENCY	Special Education Programs (ED/OSERS), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2000-08-22
NOTE	59p.
CONTRACT	H023H40002
AVAILABLE FROM	Center for Policy Research, 1012 Cameron St., Alexandria, VA 22314; Tel: 703-684-4000; Fax: 703-836-2313.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Standards; *Disabilities; Educational Assessment; *Educational Change; Educational Innovation; Elementary Secondary Education; *Outcomes of Education; *Regular and Special Education Relationship; *Student Participation

ABSTRACT

This final report discusses the activities and outcomes of the Center for Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform, a federally funded center that investigated and analyzed critical issues in current general and special education policies, their interactions, and their impact on students with disabilities. The center staff conducted ten primary studies over the course of five years. Findings from each of these studies are listed. Overall results of the studies indicate: (1) despite efforts to the contrary, special education and general education are still very separate; (2) the schedule of federal reauthorization, the promulgation of regulations, and other waivers that allowed states to delay the implementation of federal law meant that many of the changes expected in state and districts did not happen within the timeline of the Center; (3) there are marked differences in the degree to which standards-based reform is implemented across schools and the degree to which students with disabilities are included in standards-based reform; (4) there is a need to consolidate the work of the Center and other federal efforts; and (5) the federal government needs to continue to search for methods to encourage collaboration among its funded research. (CR)

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Final Report

Center for Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform on Student with Disabilities

Award no: H023H40002

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EC 308048

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Preface

The Center for Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform on Students with Disabilities (Center) was a joint endeavor of the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), the Institute for the Study of Exceptional Children and Youth at the University of Maryland (UM), and the Consortium for Policy Research in Education at the University of Pennsylvania (CPRE).

The Center was originally funded in October 1995 for a period of three years with an option to extend the Center for an additional two years, pending an external review. The Center was extended two additional years, with the total grant period ending September 30, 1999. Because of delays in beginning the Center and completing the final products, the Center received a no-cost extension to May 31, 2000.

Throughout the life of the Center, progress reports were submitted to OSEP on a quarterly basis. In addition, extensive yearly performance reports were submitted to OSEP as required. This report will not repeat the text that has already been submitted. Rather, this report will summarize the information previously submitted and reflect on the work of the Center over the past five and a half years.

This report is organized into four major sections. They are as follows:

1. Purpose and Goals describes the purpose of the grant competition and the goals of the Center. In addition, this section discusses the issues and challenges that Center staff faced in relation to implementing the four main goals of the Center.

2. Context describes the context in which the project operated, specifically the shifts in federal and state special and general education policy that influenced the research questions and design of the Center's work throughout the five and a half years.

3. Project Activities describes the project planning, framework, research questions and findings from the research. It also describes implications of the findings. Dissemination activities and recommendations are also discussed.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations provides recommendations to the Office of Special Education Programs in structuring further policy research centers as well in the future topics of research based on the experiences and findings of the Center.

Purpose and Goals

In November, 1993 the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the creation of Center for Policy Research (CFDA 84.023H). The priority for the RFP was to:

> *...establish a center to conduct a program of policy research to examine the impact of general education reform on students with disabilities and the impact of special education reform activities on the education of all students.* (Office of Special Education Programs, 1993)

Specifically, the center was to:

- *improve educational outcomes for students with disabilities by describing and documenting reforms occurring at the Federal, State, and local levels; assessing the impact of these reforms; and providing policy options to decision-makers at all levels; and*

- *contribute to improving the quality of policy research as it relates to the education of students with disabilities. This would require collaboration between special education researchers and nationally recognized policy researchers in related fields.* (p .C-8)

In response to this RFP, the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) with the Institute for the Study of Exceptional Children and Youth at the University of Maryland (UM) and the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) submitted a proposal to create the *Center for Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform: Studying Reform and its Effects on Systems and Students, Particularly Student with Disabilities.* The proposal was funded beginning October 1, 1994 for a period of five years.

The mission of the funded Center was *to investigate and analyze critical issues in current general and special education policies, their interactions, and their impact on students with disabilities, with a focus on discerning and disseminating policy options for stakeholders at the federal, state and local levels.*

The Center organized its work around four goals:

1. Create a Center for Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform whose focus is to coordinate, conduct and communicate policy research on general and special education reform and its impact on students, particularly those with disabilities.

    a. The Center will establish and conduct a coordinated program of research and dissemination.

b. The Center will take the lead in actively pursuing coordinated policy research with other principal research centers established by OSEP's division of Innovation and Development.

c. The Center will endeavor to coordinate its policy research with centers established by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI).

2. Develop and conduct a program of policy research to examine how students with disabilities are included in state and district reforms, how general and special education programs interact, and factors influential in shaping these issues. The topics of research will include:

a. Federal, state and local reform policies and initiatives;

b. Inclusion of students with disabilities in standards-based reforms and instruction;

c. Factors of capacity at the school level influencing inclusion of students with disabilities in reforms; and

d. Classroom factors influencing inclusion of students with disabilities in reforms.

3. Disseminate the Centers's findings through a plan that will capitalize on existing channels of communication proven effective with policymakers and a variety of stakeholders.

a. The Center staff will write monographs, newsletter and journal articles, issue briefs, and policy updates targeting a variety of audiences through multiple communications channels.

b. The Center's findings will be presented and discussed with a wide audience of stakeholders at the local, state, national and federal levels through the existing organizational relationships of NASBE, CPRE and UM.

4. Provide training and mentoring to graduate students in the areas of education policy, public policy and/or disability policy.

a. Students will engage in actual field research, working under the guidance of senior project staff.

b. Students will enroll in specific multidisciplinary courses, conduct policy analysis and communicate policy-relevant information in a form understandable to national, federal, state and local policymakers.

The four main goals of the Center were not modified during the five and a half years. However, some aspects of the goals were emphasized more during certain parts of the Center's work.

Discussion of the Center's Goals

GOAL 1: Create a Center for Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform whose focus is to coordinate, conduct and communicate policy research on general and special education reform and its impact on students, particularly those with disabilities.

a. **The Center will establish and conduct a coordinated program of research and dissemination.**

b. **The Center will take the lead in actively pursuing coordinated policy research with other principal research centers established by OSEP's division of Innovation and Development.**

c. **The Center will endeavor to coordinate its policy research with centers established by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI).**

Coordinating research across Center partners

Both the first three years' state-level study of the Center and the years four and five elementary and middle schools studies of CPRE and UM were specifically designed so that the studies would be coordinated across the three research partners. In order to develop the original coordinated program of research, a common set of research questions was mapped against data sources. The primary studies of the first three years included:

- State level policies and reforms across 18 states: all partners
- State-local interaction around policies and reforms: NASBE (state→local), UM (local→state)
- State policies and reforms on Title I and Teacher policy: NASBE, CPRE.

It is important to note that each partner was pursuing an individual study, however, all studies were linked by overlapping research questions. For the state-level policy study, all three partners used a common set of protocol themes. CPRE and NASBE used the same protocols for some of the state-level respondents. All partners collected a common set of state documents that were reviewed centrally by the graduate assistants, using a common review form.

In years four and five all three projects were exploring the same three research questions. CPRE and UM conducted a joint study of districts and classrooms. The two partners used the same

classroom observation forms and field researchers received common training before conducting field work.

Even though the design was coordinated, the actual data gathered by field researchers across the studies was difficult to combine and analyze. Qualitative research provides rich descriptions and rich contextual data. The methodology also allows the researcher to discover serendipitous findings. However, the particular lens of the researchers and the paths down which the story unfolds can lead to inconsistent data across studies. With a little variation in emphasis, field data can take drastically different twists, making cross-study analysis difficult.

Overall, the data that was at the most general level, i.e., tracking state policies, was easiest to combine across the three initial studies. As the data moved closer to the student, combining and analyzing the data became more difficult. While UM and NASBE were both doing state-local case studies, NASBE started with state policy and moved to district reaction to those policies while UM did the reverse. Given the sightly different focus of the two studies we were unable to cross analyze the data from these two studies as originally planned. Similarly, while the UM and CPRE teams used the same protocols and the field researchers even had similar training, the data were not sufficiently consistent to combine. The UM study had additional background information on specific students that added meaning to the classroom-level data. The CPRE research did not have this benefit. Without the added student-specific data the CPRE data was largely unusable.

The premise of the Center research design was that by linking substudies within research projects we could both maximize the number of respondents within studies and the number of individual studies. We also sought to add questions to existing CPRE studies in order to economize and get a greater "bang for the buck." This strategy was successful at the state policy level. However, it was not successful at the district policy and classroom level.

Coordinating policy research across OSEP-funded projects

During the first two years, the Center hosted two meetings among other OSEP-funded research efforts to explore the possibilities of coordinated policy research. The goals of the first meeting were:

1. Identify the studies underway – the research questions, methodology, and sample.

2. Determine if there was overlap in the research questions as a way to triangulate data gathered in different studies as well as to explore joint data gathering efforts.

3. Determine if the various projects were putting an undue data burden on any particular state or local district.

The Center gathered the information from the various research efforts and mapped the projects onto a common matrix. During the first meeting each project presented their work and extensive discussion ensued about the ability to coordinate or combine the research across projects. Of the several projects that were invited to these collaboration meetings, only one besides the Center seemed particularly interested in coordinating their work with other projects. The consensus of the majority of the participants was that coordination was not feasible.

There may be several reasons– stated and unstated– why the group could not substantively coordinate their work. First, as some claimed, coordinating aspects of their studies would interfere with the integrity of their research. Combining certain research instruments could make the resultant instrument too long. Second, the timing of the different studies made coordination difficult. If a study had already begun to gather data in the field, the investigators did not want to compromise the integrity of their protocols mid-study to include questions from other studies. However, the Center was the only OSEP-funded project that was *required* to work with other special education researchers. In effect, there was no way to compel the other projects to collaborate. Furthermore, the majority of the OSEP-funded researchers are employed in universities. These researchers operate under a set of incentives that reward the individual for being principal investigators and for individual knowledge generation. In short, there are no clear incentives from the university for collaboration. Because projects were clearly not going to alter either their sample, data collection or instruments,

The second goal of the collaboration activity was tacitly dropped before the end of the first meeting. OSEP officials expressed a great deal of concern over the potential data burden of the various studies, particularly to states. Yet, no single project was willing either to change its sample or reschedule a site visit. Projects argued that they had data gathering schedules that they had to meet in order to ensure the integrity of their data. Furthermore, the projects argued, to alter site visits could potentially put them behind in deliverables to OSEP. Hence, goal three was also tacitly dropped during the first meeting.

All participants agreed that it was interesting to hear presentations from colleagues involved in special education policy research– goal 1 of the meeting. And, since the two other goals were not *officially* abandoned, a second meeting was scheduled.

The second meeting essentially proceeded as the first. That is, projects were happy to share what they were doing, but not specifically collaborate. OSEP officials raised concerns about data burden, but did not compel any of the projects to coordinate their efforts. Given this pattern, it was determined that there were other exisitng meetings for sharing data and it was futile to continue this activity. Thus, the meetings did not result in coordinated policy research.

Coordinating policy research with OERI-funded projects

The Center was also required to coordinate its work across other general education projects. This goal was primarily pursued through our work with CPRE, one of the five national OERI-funded

research centers. As noted above, our coordination with CPRE was most successful in describing state-level policies. There appears to be two issues to consider when pursuing this type of coordination:

- the relationship of one subpopulation of students to the whole population; and
- the individualized nature of special education versus general education.

As was noted in the original Center proposal, special education and general education research is largely distinct. This is still largely the case. As a special student population, students in special education are not the primary target of general education research. Thus, questions regarding special education or other special student populations are an "add on" to the core of most general education studies. It may be fruitful for special education policy research to parallel general education policy research in timing, sample (site selection), methodology and instrumentation in those areas where there is clear overlap, such as assessment and accountability. In other areas that are particular to special education (e.g., due process and FAPE), coordination with OERI-funded projects seems less likely.

Second special education is based on individualization. The supports and services and learning needs of a typical class of students in special education are diverse. General education is primarily based on a standard curriculum and classroom-level delivery of instruction. As a result, *classroom practice* may be more difficult to capture and analyze across student populations than *policy*. And, as stated above, state level activity may be more feasible for coordinated study than classroom investigation.

Both of these issues were complicating factors in another general education collaboration that the Center undertook with the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). UM and NASBE worked with CCSSO to have ten questions regarding students with disabilities specifically added to the CCSSO biannual survey of state departments' of education policies and programs.

The survey results were influenced by the particular person who responded to the survey in each state. Often this was a person connected to general education who had limited knowledge of special education. In addition, the limitations of survey research provided limited choices for respondents trying to convey an accurate picture of how special education was included in the state policies for school accreditation versus federal and state monitoring activities.

GOAL 2: Develop and conduct a program of policy research to examine how students with disabilities are included in state and district reforms, how general and special education programs interact, and factors influential in shaping these issues. The topics of research will include:

- **Federal, state and local reform policies and initiatives;**

- **Inclusion of students with disabilities in standards-based reforms and instruction;**

- **Factors of capacity at the school level influencing inclusion of students with disabilities in reforms; and**

- **Classroom factors influencing inclusion of students with disabilities in reforms.**

The Center undertook a variety of studies on a number of topics. While the Center published several reports and articles on their findings, there are some research issues that altered the course of exploration from that which was originally proposed. Issues that arose were related to:

- the scope of research topics;

- limitations due to the specific research methodologies proposed; and

- limitations of "add on" studies.

Research Topics

The Center undertook an ambitious course of research over five years. The range of research topics offered in the original proposal was very comprehensive. The topics were in response to a comprehensive list put forth in the original request for proposal from OSEP. Although the Center conducted a great deal of research, we were not able to cover the breadth of research topics originally proposed given our scope of funding. In lieu of addressing the broad spectrum of research topics noted in the original Request for Proposal and our responding proposal, we instead focused our efforts primarily on general education reform efforts and the inclusion of special education and students with disabilities in those efforts. This decision has merit. First, it was of primary importance in the 1997 reauthorization of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In addition, in preliminary interviews with state directors of special education, the topic was of primary importance to them. Finally, when asking state directors of special education their primary *special education* reforms in 1994-95, they typically responded with "inclusion." Inclusion, while a special education reform, is particularly related to the impact of general education reforms on students with disabilities.

The original Center proposal (and the Request for Proposals) also included the intent to research the impact of federal legislation on special education and students with disabilities. While the reauthorization of IDEA was anticipated in 1995, it was not reauthorized until 1997. Although states were aware of the changes in law as a result of the reauthorization, little actually changed in state and districts practice right away. Given the time delay in states in passing new laws and regulation to comply with IDEA 97 and then the delay in impact to the local districts, we were

not able to capture much of the impact of IDEA 97. Likewise, while Title I was reauthorized in 1994, state waivers from the deadlines for change pushed back actual impact of those changes for several years. As a result in the delays in federal legislation and the delay in state and district implementation, many of the federal reforms that were proposed research topics are just now being felt at the district level. Hence, the timeline for studying federal reforms appears to have been off by about two to three years.

Research Methodologies

The Center undertook multiple methodologies to conduct its research. The primary methodology was cumulative case studies. NASBE and UM conducted state and district case studies over the course of the first three years. The local district work of the remaining two years for NASBE and UM was primarily in the same districts as the first three years of study. The longevity of the studies presented some difficulty in maintaining the integrity of the sample. Often longitudinal studies will significantly oversample a target population to take into consideration attrition throughout the years. Case studies do not readily lend themselves to over-sampling. In addition, districts that were demographically matched at the beginning of the sample may no longer match after two or three years, especially in small school districts where relatively few students can make significant changes in the percentages of students in special education, receiving free or reduced lunch, or in specific minority groups.

Another methodological issue emerged in the national survey of special education directors. First, special education districts vary a great deal across the country. Some are contiguous with local school districts; some special education districts are consortia of several districts. In addition, some special education directors administer programs that are located in a variety of settings, predominately in public schools. Other special education directors administer programs only in special segregated buildings or statewide programs, such as state schools for the deaf and/or blind. Hence, even defining the special education director was troublesome. In addition, the surveys assumed that special education directors could describe general education reforms and how students with disabilities were included in those reforms or could obtain that information. For too many of the those surveyed, neither assumption held true. Hence, the return rate for the survey (even with a special emphasis on urban districts) was too low to report publically.

Limitations of "Add-on" Research

The Center's Year 4 and 5 study conducted by CPRE was an "add on" to a larger study of eleven districts to investigate the progress and implementation of standards-based reform. In the core study CPRE conducted site visits in 32 elementary schools. The site visits included interviewing the principals, school improvement committee chairs, four to five teachers and observing classrooms. Through the Center part of the study the site visitors asked classroom teachers to identify which students were on IEPs so that they could be specifically observed for their engagement in instruction and the types of materials they were using. The original intent of the

CPRE add-on study was to conduct two kinds of analyses. CPRE originally planned to test the findings that emerged from UM's fourth year site visits (later published in the Center monograph, *Reform for EVERY Learner: Teachers' Views on Standards and Students with Disabilities*). In addition, it was CPRE's intent to extend the analysis to teachers in the 28 other schools that CPRE was investigating.

The proposed CPRE analysis was not conducted for two reasons. First, the CPRE data did not contain information about specific student needs, only teacher behavior. Therefore, it was impossible to determine if the teacher behavior was appropriate or responding to the students' educational plan. Furthermore, without speaking to the special education teachers it was difficult to determine who was specifically responsible for ensuring access to the general education curriculum and when that instruction was provided. That is, just because the student was in a general education class during observation, it was not conclusive that that was the full extent of his or her access to the general education curriculum.

GOAL 3: Disseminate the Centers's findings through a plan that will capitalize on existing channels of communication proven effective with policymakers and a variety of stakeholders.

- **The Center staff will write monographs, newsletter and journal articles, issue briefs, and policy updates targeting a variety of audiences through multiple communications channels.**

- **The Center's findings will be presented and discussed with a wide audience of stakeholders at the local, state, national and federal levels through the existing organizational relationships of NASBE, CPRE and UM.**

The Center published a number of studies, reports, and articles throughout its tenure. In addition, Center staff presented Center findings at a number of conferences, seminars and briefing sessions. Both the written products and the Center presentations were chronicled across the quarterly reports submitted to OSEP throughout the life of the Center and are listed in the project activities section of the report..

Of note is the additional dissemination of the Center products, sometimes years after original publication. Districts and states are in very different phases of implementing standard-based reform and including students with disabilities in that reform. There remains a market for the publications that were written earlier about these reforms as the same issues seems to be faced by states and districts over and over again across the country. Of the major Center publications, the following table reflects their distribution *beyond* the 2500 that was originally proposed.

Table 1

WHAT WILL IT TAKE

1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
32	215	59	5	1

TOTAL 312

STATE ACCT SYSTEMS & STUDENTS W/DISABILITIES

1997	1998	1999	2000
31	67	13	4

TOTAL 115

STANDARS-BASED REFORMS & STUDENTS W/DISABILITIES

1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
356	197	89	4	6

TOTAL 652

CHARTER SCHOOLS & STUDENTS W/DISABILITIES

1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
21	148	53	4	5

TOTAL 231

PUSH & PULL

1998	1999	2000
91	18	10

TOTAL 119

SNAPSHOTS OF REFORM

1998	1999	2000
NO REPORTED SALES	13	8

TOTAL 21

TOTAL QUANTITY SOLD IN ALL IS 1,450

In addition, the Center was able to distribute the final two monographs, *Reform for EVERY Learner: Teachers' Views on Standards and Students With Disabilities* and *Reforming High School: Learning the Effect of the Standards Movement on Secondary Students with Disabilities* to the full membership of the Council for Administrators in Special Education (CASE).

Overall the field of communications has changed a great deal over the past five years. The internet now provides methods of communication to several people who previously did not have access to the "information highway." Internet and web-based communication has implications for future dissemination plans including: chat rooms, publishing interim findings from studies, publication in web-based journals, and integrating videotaped examples of findings into the text.

GOAL 4: Provide training and mentoring to graduate students in the areas of education policy, public policy and/or disability policy.

- **Students will engage in actual field research, working under the guidance of senior project staff.**

- **Students will enroll in specific multidisciplinary courses, conduct policy analysis and communicate policy-relevant information in a form understandable to national, federal, state and local policymakers.**

OSEP places a high priority on ensuring that new special education researchers are continually developed. One way in which OSEP supports this development is to require that research projects support graduate students. As was proposed, graduate students were supported throughout the life of the Center to provide training and mentoring in the fields of education policy, public policy and disability policy. Five graduate students received assistantships during each semester of the Center and efforts were made to ensure that they were integrally involved in both the field research and writing articles. Graduate students provide interesting perspectives on the research and they provide needed research and writing support. However, there were drawbacks to integrating graduate students into the work of the Center.

The first drawback was the comparatively short time graduate assistants were with the project. By definition, graduate students do not stay with the project very long. Graduate students with the Center typically stayed with the project for a year, at times eighteen months. As a result, the Center could not benefit fully from the investments made in training individuals to conduct research or to develop products in a manner acceptable for publication. Hence, there was a diminished return on the investment that the Center made in specific graduate students. While the field overall is enriched by the addition of trained researchers, the individual project suffers from continually having to train new staff. With flat funding over the course of the Center, the project was faced with either relying more heavily on the work of graduate assistants (at a lower remuneration rate) or conducting less research. Relying more heavily on graduate assistants was difficult since there was no shared history or training with the project.

The second drawback was the writing ability of the graduate assistants. With a few notable exceptions, products delivered to NASBE that were produced by graduate assistants had to be extensively rewritten to be of publishable quality. Many of the graduate students have had little experience in writing for publication. This weakness becomes a drawback in either the level of responsibility that can be given to a graduate assistant or the level of intensive oversight that a graduate assistant must have in completing writing tasks.

Context

The past five and a half years have been a time of great change in education policy. The policy environment in which the Center began its work is vastly different from the policy environment of today. Some of the major shifts from the mid-1990s to 1999 are noted below:

- Many states had developed curriculum frameworks to provide guidance to local communities. These have been revised to include content and performance standards, often on a grade by grade basis.

- Many states were putting in place standards in areas other than the traditional disciplines such as communication and problem solving. However, faced with the difficulty in evaluating some of these skills, states have tended to gravitate back toward the discipline-based standards.

- Many states were exploring increased use of "authentic assessment." These included performance tasks, portfolios, or projects. However, because of reliability concerns, most states have retreated from those types of assessments and are using either norm- or criterion-referenced standard-response testing. At the same time, there has been an increased focus on statewide assessment, particularly those with high stakes for students and schools. Changes in Title I and IDEA have forced the hand of districts and states to include all students in assessment systems. How successfully states do this remains to be seen.

- Goals 2000, The Educate America Act was passed in 1994. Goals 2000 provided federal leadership and resources to state educational agencies to implement systemic education improvements for all students. This included developing curriculum content and student performance standards, state assessments aligned with content standards, and opportunity to learn standards or strategies for all students. At the time this project began states were forming their Goals 2000 panels and developing their plans. Since then, most of the Goals 2000 initiatives have been subsumed in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and Goals 2000 will soon be eliminated.

- In 1995 the field anticipated the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). It was anticipated that the new amendments would be enacted in

1995 so that the Center could study its effects by 1997-98. However, the reauthorization negotiations proved highly contentious, forcing a significant delay in the process. The reauthorization was not complete until 1997 and some of the significant requirements, such as alternate assessments are not required to be in place until this summer.

- In 1995 much of special education reform was defined as creating a unified system of special and general education and including students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Now, the rhetoric has shifted to a focus on ensuring access to the curriculum for students with disabilities and to measure their progress according to the aforementioned standards. In addition, current debate centers around discipline and the shortfall of the originally promised federal funding (40% of excess cost).

- In 1994, although discipline was an issue, few broached the issue of cessation of service for students with disabilities as a result of discipline violations. However, given the spate of school shootings over the past three years the issue has become highly emotional. Issues related to discipline have highlighted the dynamic tension between federal guarantees of students' with disabilities rights and local control. This debate is occurring in the larger context of the appropriate federal role in education.

- In 1994 the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was reauthorized, breaking from the "pull out" model of small group instruction to codify a "whole school" model of reform. Special education was the only federal categorical program that was exempt from the whole school designs. IDEA 97 eliminated the "incidental benefit" provision allowing special education funds to be comingled with other categorical funds to support educational programming in a school.

- The phenomenon of charter schools and choice were just gaining momentum at the time the Center was funded. At the time the Center began its work there were no studies that specifically looked at the treatment and outcomes of students with disabilities in charter schools. Advocates for students with disabilities speculated that charter school would segregate students by "creaming" the best students from the neighborhood public schools to selective charter schools. Based on the work of the Center and others, it appears as if the reverse may be true. That is, there is a higher rate of students with disabilities and/or considered at-risk of school failure in charter schools than the general public school population.

While there were other notable changes in special education policy during this time (e.g., a new federal funding formula, changes in state monitoring, early intervention, expansion of the developmentally delayed category to age nine, and a requirement that state funding formulae be "placement neutral"), the above bullets provide general context for the work of the Center.

Project Activities

Planning and Development of the Project

Much of the first three years of work of the Center was conceptualized for the original proposal. The overall conceptual framework, research structure and design were developed for the proposal. These were presented to staff at OSEP for feedback and comment very early in the project. Specific research questions, site selection, and instrumentation for data collection were reviewed by the Advisory Board prior to confirming and conducting site visits. The second Advisory Board meeting was scheduled six months after the first meeting. This provided the Board an opportunity to discuss the preliminary findings from the first year's investigation and their implications for Year Two data collection. The meetings for Years Three and Four provided the same opportunities for input into the research design of the Center.

The research for the final two years of the project was developed based on four primary factors: (1) the first three years of research, (2) input from the external review panel, (3) developments in the field with respect to IDEA 97 and standards-based reform, and (4) the existing studies of CPRE. The first three years of research lead Center staff to shift its focus from primarily the federal and state level to investigation at the local district and classroom level. Feedback from the External Review Panel provided input into the topics to be explored, with a particular focus on local capacity to include students with disabilities in reform efforts. Both IDEA 97 and standards-based reform has put more pressure on secondary students through high-stakes individual accountability in a way that was not present in the first years of the Center. NASBE's Year 4 and 5 study shifted focus to the high school as a way to investigate the impact of these reforms on students with disabilities. Finally, as was the case with the first years of the Center, the strategy for CPRE's involvement was to include research questions germane to this project into larger, ongoing CPRE studies.

New research strategies were also employed during the final two years of the Center. In an effort to address coordination issues that surfaced in the first three years of the study, CPRE and UM also planned and used identical research protocols and common researcher training.

Conceptual framework of the project

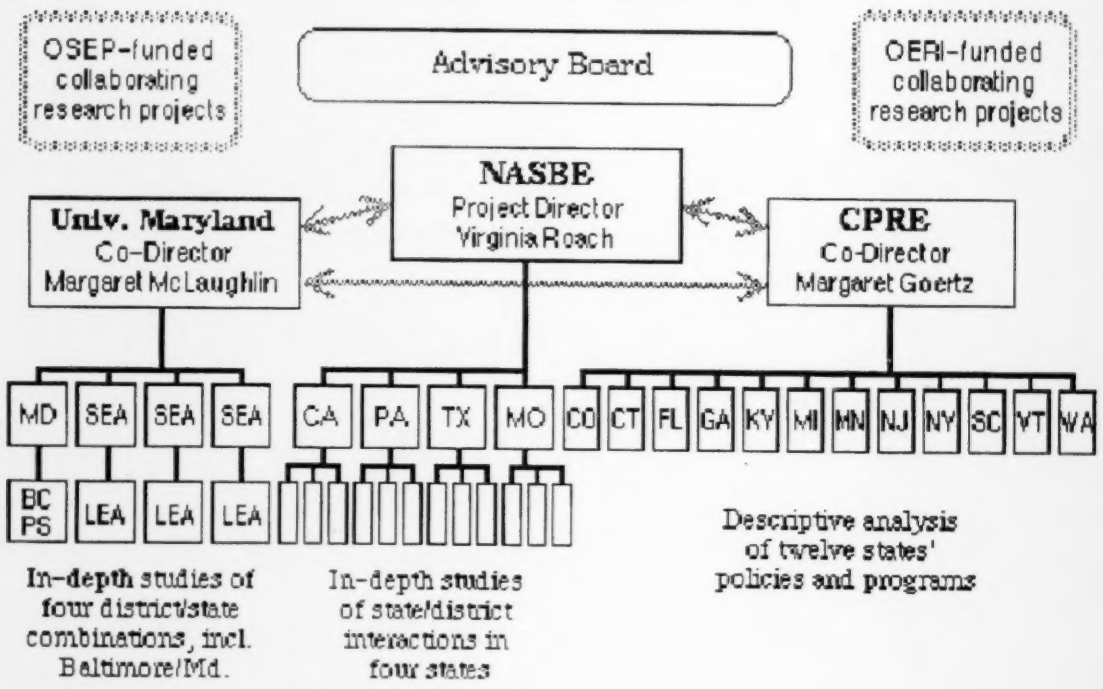
The Center's research was based on describing and analyzing the interaction among federal, state, and local policymaking and program development. Figures 1 and 2 present the original research structure and framework for the research design. This framework reflects the intergovernmental structure of education policy, including special education policy. Figure 2 on the following page presents the major issues that were to be researched at each level of government. Those issues informed the specific research questions used to guide the Center's work, found later in this section.

The Center proposed to research, document, and analyze the implementation and impacts of

national educational policies including federal statutes and regulations on state and local special education policy and practice. At the same time, state-generated reforms were analyzed in terms of their implementation and impact on local district policy and programs. Changes in local district policy and programs were, in turn, examined in relation to the demands placed on states, and how state-level policies accommodated local innovations. The goal of the research was to was to discern the impact of policies from all these level on students with disabilities.

Figure 1

BASIC RESEARCH STRUCTURE



As was noted earlier, the actual research topics were narrowed from the original proposal. Notably, the Center focused more on general education topics and the extent to which special education was included in those topics than the Center looked at topics that pertained only to special education. However, particularly in the first years of the Center's research, most of the topics in the Major Research Issues framework were explored in the states and districts that were studies by UM and NASBE.

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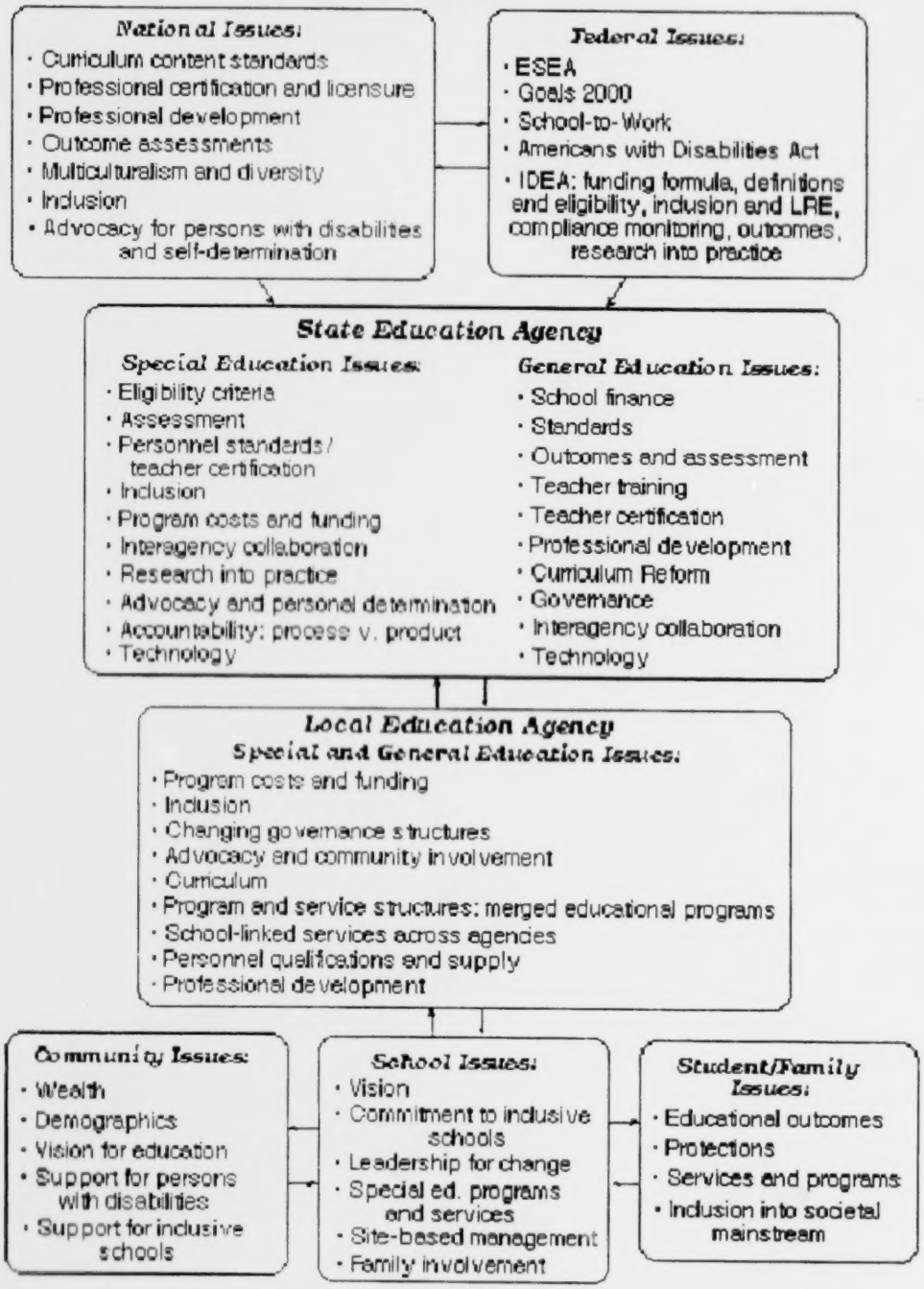
Figure 2

MAJOR RESEARCH ISSUES



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Contributors to the project

Aside from the project staff there were four other prime contributors to the project. They were:

1. The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)– the program officer as well as the head of the Division of Research to Practice;

2. the Advisory Board;

3. the project's Graduate Assistants; and

4. professional editorial staff at NASBE.

The Office of Special Education Programs was instrumental in helping to pull together the early collaboration meetings of the project across OSEP-funded programs. In addition, OSEP provided guidance on the status of federal initiatives and preliminary findings from other OSEP-funded work which informed and helped to refine our research questions across the years.

The Advisory Board provided input to the project design, methodology and research questions. In addition, they provided input into the types and formats of Center products. For example, based on the Board's comments during the first Advisory Board meeting, NASBE modified the local district data collection plan for the state→local case studies. NASBE visited two (instead of three) districts in each state and interviewed a broader range of individuals in each district. The Advisory Board also discussed our findings with respect to their experiences as a way to validate our analysis.

The Advisory Board was particularly helpful in the discussions of whether or not to disseminate research from the final two years of the Center. As was discussed in section entitled "Goals and Purpose" neither UM's fourth year survey nor CPRE's year 4 research were disseminated. This was done on advice of the Advisory Board, drawing on their expertise with Office of Management and Budget guidelines.

The Graduate Assistants were instrumental in gathering data, data analysis, and developing products for dissemination. All of the studies conducted by UM and CPRE included research conducted by at least one graduate student. One graduate assistant went on one of the NASBE state-level site visits. Graduate assistants were also responsible for developing and submitting the newsletter articles for publication as well as submitting two *Policy Updates* to NASBE for publication. Graduate assistants were co-authors on several of the Center issue briefs and monographs including:

- *Standards-Based School Reform and Students with Disabilities;*

- *Charter Schools and Students with Disabilities;* and

- *Snapshots of Reform: How Five Local Districts Are Interpreting Standards-Based Reform for Students with Disabilities.*

In addition, the graduate assistants were co-authors to four additional reports of the Center:

- *State Level Policies and Practices: Where are Students with Disabilities?*
- *The Reauthorization of IDEA: Views from the Field*
- *Education Reform Policies and Students with Disabilities: Report on National Survey*
- *Education Reform Policies and Students with Disabilities: Report on Survey of Large Districts*

Professional Editorial Staff At NASBE reviewed and edited each publication before it was printed. In some instances, this review consisted of minor editing of text and ensuring that citations were in the correct format. In other instances (as noted earlier), the editorial staff worked a great deal with authors to rewrite products extensively so that they could be read by a wide audience. In these cases, editorial staff reviewed the original research and other articles on point and talked extensively with the original writer (graduate student).

Research Questions and Methodology

Questions

The Center had six primary research topics for years one through three and three primary research topics for years four and five. See Tables 2 and 3 for the research topics, questions, and years in which they were studied and the Center partner conducting investigation into that particular question.

Table 2
CENTER FOR POLICY RESEARCH

Matrix of Primary Research Questions

RESEARCH TOPICS	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	STUDY	YEARS
A. Federal and national reform policies and special education	1. Which federal general educational statutory and regulatory policies and other national education reform initiatives are impacting on special education programs and services?	ALL	1-3
B. Special education statutory and regulatory flexibility	1. Which provisions in IDEA statute and regulations are perceived as impacting on state and local ability to restructure special education services? Which provisions are seen as restricting or facilitating efforts to increase flexibility in state/local special education policy and practices?	NASBE/UM	1-3
	2. Which state education policies are affecting LEA attempts to increase flexibility in the implementation of IDEA?	UM/NASBE	1-3
	3. What strategies has been impact of judicial decisions on attempts to create greater flexibility?	NASBE/UM	1-3
C. Performance and compliance monitoring and technical assistance	1. What strategies has the federal government used to enforce IDEA?	NASBE	2-3
	2. What influence are federal and state judicial decisions having on state monitoring procedures of local districts?	NASBE/UM	1-3
	3. How have states implemented compliance monitoring of special education within in local districts?	NASBE/UM	1-3
	4. What types of technical assistance do states engage in to support special education compliance?	NASBE	2-3
	5. What types of technical assistance and other capacity-building activities exist to support local implementation of IDEA?	UM	1-3

RESEARCH TOPICS	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	STUDY	YEARS
D. State and local restructuring	1. In what arenas are states independently initiating educational reforms and what is the scope and scale of the various initiatives?	ALL	1-3
	2. To what extent have special education and students with disabilities been explicitly included in reform policies at the state level?	ALL	1-3
	3. In what arenas are local districts independently initiating educational reforms and what is the scope of the various initiatives?	UM/NASBE	1-3
	4. What is the interaction between local-level education, general and special education reforms and restructuring efforts, and state-level special education statute and regulations? Which policies present the greatest barriers, and which policies facilitate change?	NASBE/UM	1-3
E. Policies promoting inclusion	1. What federal policies and practices have supported the development of inclusive schools?	UM/NASBE	1-3
	2. What state policies have supported development of inclusive schools?	NASBE/CPRE	1-3
	3. How are locally developed inclusion programs supported or hindered by state and federal policies and procedures, and by other factors?	UM	1-3
F. Blending educational programs	1. What efforts are states making to blend or coordinate categorical educational programs?	NASBE/CPRE	3
	2. What efforts are local education agencies engaging in to blend categorical educational programs?	UM	1-3

Table 3
CENTER FOR POLICY RESEARCH
Matrix of Primary Research Questions
Years 4 and 5

RESEARCH TOPICS	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	STUDY	YEARS
A. Inclusion of students with disabilities in district reform efforts.	1. What reform initiatives are districts addressing?	NASBE/CPRE	4-5
	2. What does it mean to include students with disabilities in standards, curricula, assessment, and accountability reforms?	ALL	4-5
	3. What districts policies and practices are directed at including students with disabilities in general education reforms?	NASBE/CPRE	4-5
	4. How are students with disabilities included in district accountability programs?	ALL	4-5
	5. How are students with disabilities included in district-wide assessments?	ALL	4-5
	6. How are students with disabilities addressed in the teacher development policies of the district?	NASBE	4-5
	7. To what degree are students with disabilities included in instruction and curriculum guided by standards?	ALL	4-5
	8. How are general and special education teachers, and other service providers, accommodating students with disabilities in reforms? What accommodations are provided? By whom?	UM	4-5
	9. To what extent do classroom teaching practices include students with disabilities in reforms? How are those practices changing?	CPRE/UM	4-5
	10. How are students with disabilities impacted by site-based management and other governance changes?	NASBE	4-5

RESEARCH TOPICS	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	STUDY	YEARS
B. Factors at school, district, and state levels impacting inclusion of students with disabilities in reform?	1. What policies and factors of capacity at the school level facilitate or constrain the ability of schools and classrooms to include students with disabilities in standards-based reform?	ALL	4-5
	2. To what extent do all teachers and other specialists work as an integrated group to include students with disabilities in reform? How does this affect their capacity to include students with disabilities in reform?	NASBE	4-5
	3. What are the perceptions of faculty and other service providers regarding their capacity to include students with disabilities in reforms?	UM/NASBE	4-5
	4. What policies and practices at the district and state levels facilitate or constrain school and classroom capacity to include students with disabilities in reforms?	CPRE/NASBE	4-5
	5. What ***incentives*** at he classroom, school, and district levels encourage or discourage inclusion of students with disabilities in curricular and assessment reforms?	CPRE	4-5
	6. To what extent do teachers, parents, and local community members support including students with disabilities in various reforms?	CPRE	4-5

Methodology

The Center staff conducted ten primary studies over the course of the five years. They are as follows:

1. State tracking study of the inclusion of students with disabilities and special education in standards-based reform policies across eighteen states.

2. State-district case studies of state-level reform policies in four states and their impact on two demographically matched school districts in each of the states.

3. District-state case studies of standard-based reform policies initiated by five exemplary school districts in five different states and the role the state had in shaping and or impacting the district reforms.

4. A study of the charter schools in Colorado.

5. Study of the federal and state special education monitoring systems and their interaction with new state accountability systems.

6. "Add on" to biennial survey conducted by the Council of Chief State School Officers of state education policies and practices.

7. National survey of directors of special education

    a. special sample of large districts.

8. Classroom- and student-level study of students' inclusion in standards-based reform at the elementary and middle school level.

9. Cross-case study of the effect of the standards movement on secondary students with disabilities.

10. Descriptive synthesis of district special education directors' perspectives on reform.

Different methodologies were utilized across the studies. The Center's primary methodology was qualitative as defined by Lincoln & Guba (1985) and Yin (1984). That is researchers utilized interviews and document reviews to discern federal- state- and district-level policy. Data gathering was iterative in that data gathered from one source was used to enrich and advance the collection of future data.

As the Center continued its work and moved from providing descriptive analysis, to case studies, cross-case analysis, and the evaluation of policy impact across different levels of government, the

researchers utilized pragmatic evaluation strategies that integrated both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods (*Green, Caracelli, and Graham, 1989* in *Center for Policy Research, 2000*, p. 6). This included document reviews, such as standards, handbooks, minutes from meetings; interviews; review of district testing and performance data; and classroom observation.

Finally, the Center utilized survey methodology in three of its studies. Basic descriptive statistical analysis was conducted on the data from the national survey of directors of special education. However, the other two studies that included survey methodology used a mixture of open-ended and close-ended response items. Open-ended responses were categorized to the extent possible and simple frequencies were reported.

The table below summarized the studies and the research methodologies utilized.

Table 4: Summary of Research Methodologies by Study

Study	Methodology/sources of data
1. 18-State Tracking of Policies	document review, interviews, descriptive analysis
2. State-district case studies	document review; extensive interviews; triangulation of data to develop case studies and cross-case analysis
3. District-state case studies	document review, interviews, focus groups, observation, triangulation of data to develop case studies and cross-case analysis
4. Charter schools study	survey of charter schools in state, mixed response items; document review; interviews at state, district and school level
5. Monitoring/accountability study	document review; interviews; review of the extant literature on accountability; descriptive analysis
6. Add-on survey items to CCSSO survey	mail survey with mixed close-ended and open-ended response items, descriptive analysis of responses
7. National survey of directors of special education	mail survey with close-ended response items; large district follow up phone survey with close-ended response items; use of extant data published on internet by districts; descriptive statistical analysis
8. Classroom- and student-level study	direct observation, document review, interviews, case study, cross-case analysis
9. Cross-case high school study	extensive interviews, attendance at school meetings, document reviews, informal observation, case study, cross-case analysis
10. Synthesis of special education directors' perspectives	interviews

Results of the Research

Summarized below are the findings from the ten Center studies. These findings are discussed in detail in the Center's technical reports, published monographs and issue briefs. Below is a brief description of each study with the key findings listed.

1. State tracking study of the inclusion of students with disabilities and special education in standards-based reform policies across eighteen states. This study was a descriptive analysis of trends in state general and special education reform policies with a particular emphasis on how students with disabilities were included in standards-based reforms.

Findings, as reported in the Center publications *Issue Brief: Standards-Based Reform and Students with Disabilities* (June 1996) and *What Will It Take? Standards-Based Education Reform for ALL Students* (September 1996):

- Standards-based reform calls for educators to help ALL students meet the standards, this is explicitly included in many states' standards documents.
- Special education has not played a significant role in in the development of either state content standards or specific curriculum frameworks.
- Special educators most often review standards and curriculum documents prepared by other educators.
- There is some evidence that those states that embarked on the standards-based reform process later than others tended to include special educators to a greater extent than those who were pioneers in standards-based reform.
- Special educators have largely not been involved in developing assessments for the new state standards, with a few notable exceptions.
- The inclusion of students with disabilities in state assessments is highly variable and there is little state direction to support the decisions of IEP teams regarding standardized assessment.
- As states begin to hold districts accountable for student performance, they are looking more closely at the quality of special education in their monitoring efforts.
- States are increasingly coordinating accountability and monitoring visits.
- Special education and general education teachers' preparation is largely separate from one another. However, general education teachers in some states are being prepared to work

with a variety of students in the general education classroom.

- Professional development of general and special education teachers can be very separate or very integrated, depending on the district. Interestingly, much of the interaction between the two fields seems to be initiated by special educators.

- Special education funding is largely separate from general education funding. In times of tight fiscal constraints, many states capped the growth of or froze special education state funding levels.

2. State-district case studies of state-level reform policies in four states and their impact on two demographically matched school districts in each of the states. This was a cross-case analysis of four cumulative case studies of state policy reforms and their impact on two demographically matched districts. Both general and special education policy was examined with an eye toward its impact on district policies and students with disabilities.

Findings as reported in the Center monograph, *The Push and Pull of Standards-Based Reform* (1998):

- The cost of education is rising, as enrollments and the proportion of students with special needs have increased. Yet the growth in school revenues barely offset enrollment growth and inflation from 1991-95. State support of education decreased during this same period, driving up the local share of education funding. The results was increased allegations at the local level that special education was "encroaching" on the general education dollar.

- To cope with increased revenue needs, study districts looked for other ways to raise resources from state, private and federal sources, typically through special grants and initiatives. Raising these funds distracts from the educators' mission, splinters district energies, and can increase fragmentation as different grants have different aims and goals.

- Districts were not responding to state standards with the same type of immediacy with which they responded to cost pressures because: (1) the state standards and frameworks were often too general; (2) standards were debated and revised several times, leaving teachers with a "wait and see" attitude.

- The level of awareness of state accountability systems in local districts varied a great deal, depending on the: district size, whether or not the district had its own accountability system, the consequences attached to the accountability system, other– more pressing– issues in the district, and whether or not the district was faring poorly in the accountability system.

- At the high school level, there was a strong school-to-work emphasis across the districts.

- There is a great deal of variability in the programs and services provided to students with disabilities, even among schools in a given district.

- Many districts are developing cross-categorical and non-categorical special education programming as well as developing inclusionary models of instruction.

- Districts are trying to avoid unnecessary special education placement through pre-referral strategies; early, intense reading instruction; and improved training for diagnosticians.

- There is a great deal of variability in how inclusion is defined across districts and schools: this may or may not include attending the neighborhood school.

- Students tended to be included in the general education classroom less as they got older.

- Students with high-prevalence disabilities in the study districts were more likely to be targeted for inclusion.

- In those districts where the school suggests inclusive placements for students, the distribution of included students tends to be more equitable across socio-economic and racial lines. In those districts where parents must request inclusion, the inclusive placements tended to be of children of well-connected parents.

- Districts were struggling a good deal more with how to include students with disabilities in standards-based reform than in other reforms the districts were engaged in.

- While state policies have generally encouraged the participation of students with disabilities in statewide assessments, they have also allowed district considerable leeway in this matter. Exclusion guidelines have traditionally been very broad. As a result, exclusion rates vary widely among districts.

- When including students with disabilities in statewide assessments, all of the study districts considered how assessment results were reported.

- Including students with disabilities in regular classes has raised a number of issues relating to grading. Teachers are struggling with holding all students to a common standard but also having flexibility to report genuine achievements of students.

- There is a great deal of variability among states and individual students in the requirements for high school graduation. In three of the four study states IEP teams determine the graduation requirements for students with disabilities.

- Service delivery for students with disabilities in site-based managed schools is highly

variable and largely left to the decisions of the local site council.

3. District-state case studies of standard-based reform policies. This was a study of reform policies initiated by five exemplary school districts in five different states and the role the state had in shaping and or impacting the district reforms.

Findings, as reported in the Center monograph, *Snapshots of Reform: How Five Local Districts Are Interpreting Standards-Based Reform for Students with Disabilities* (1998):

- District administrators struggled with creating "buy in" from parents and teachers for the new standards.
- All districts felt that they were faced with increasing student diversity whether it was racial, socio-economic, or linguistic.
- Districts, schools and teachers were barraged by numerous reforms, leaving personnel reform wary.
- Schools had to redirect money themselves to support reform efforts, little new money was allocated to supporting the new standards.
- Many teachers and principals felt powerless about the reform initiatives. Teachers felt victimized and unable to get the students to the standards. However, teachers in historically high-performing districts had more optimism about the standards and reforms.
- Most standards were deemed not specific enough to guide teaching while at the same time, broadening the scope of the curriculum. Standards were also credited with changing instruction to emphasize more problem solving tasks.
- Schools were looking for ways to create more instructional time in the day.
- There were vast differences in how schools implemented standards.
- Including students with disabilities in standards-based reform was seen as broadening the curriculum for those students. At the same time, special education teachers saw this as a way to focus instruction for students with disabilities.
- Special education teachers feel that teaching to the standards crowds out necessary instruction in functional skills for students with disabilities.
- Instructional collaboration among general and special education teachers was promoted by having common standards. This collaboration was more prominent at the elementary level.

- Some teachers felt that they could provide more intensive instruction in the standards by removing students with IEPs from the regular classroom.

- Teachers were unclear when to apply instructional modifications and/or accommodations. Modified standards often lead to lower expectations and an over-reliance on reading proficiency as a determinant of content level.

- Focusing on new assessments and reporting student scores caused anxiety for all teachers. Teachers felt that some students would not meet the standards.

- Teachers tended to teach to the assessment whose scores were going to be reported, not realizing the importance of multiple student measures.

- In those districts where "authentic" assessments and student portfolios were being used, teachers felt that they didn't have enough time to develop the assessments.

- Teachers were leery of including students with disabilities in the state assessments. This was seen as punishing students as well as bringing down the school's overall score.

- There was little guidance for how IEP teams decided which accommodations a student received in testing. Accommodations were perceived as "leveling the playing field" but not really seen as vehicles to measure student achievment.

- The assessments were driving changes in what students were taught. However, this was not necessarily systematic or related to the IEP.

- Teachers generally viewed inclusion in the standards as a positive move for students with disabilities, but inclusion in the assessment as negative.

- Overall, special education programs were largely ignored by site-based management councils.

- Teachers were concerned about the amount of time they had to devote to a site-based management councils.

- Site-based management councils may contribute to a lack of focus among some schools. Standards brought an opportunity to refocus and unify the system.

4. A study of the charter schools in Colorado. This study is based on site visits and interviews to four charter schools as well as a review of ten charters and a survey of eighteen charter schools. All data was collected in Colorado.

Findings of the study are reported in the Center Issue Brief *Charter Schools and Students with Disabilities* (1996).

- Colorado's charter schools offer considerable diversity in curriculum and instructional approaches.

- Charter schools generally lack start-up funds as well as general fiscal management procedures. Local districts have provided assistance to charter schools in some instances where there have overspent or need to fire the school's director and were unsure how to proceed.

- There seems to be a strong sense of commitment and community among parents and teachers in charter schools. There were a small group of parents who were unhappy with the charter school. Most of these parents usually voluntarily withdrew their children.

- Charter schools, as a whole were serving roughly the same proportion of students with disabilities as the public schools. However, the rate varied widely among the schools.

- The majority of the charter schools had special educators on staff. However, these schools tended to purchase related services from the local districts in which they reside. This could become a prohibitive expense for the schools.

- There appear to be a large number of students who are not classified in special education but who have special needs that are enrolled in charter schools. This may be due to the increased individualization reported in those schools. These students are not necessarily referred for a special education evaluation as the staff feel that the students are getting individualized attention and there is no financial incentive to identify the children as special education eligible.

- Special education in Colorado's charter schools is funded through a couple of methods. In some instances, special education staff are employed by the school. In some instances, the school contracts with the district for special education staff. In some instances, the charter schools pay host districts a kind of retainer, establishing a "risk pool" for students with disabilities.

- Most charter school administers identified the local school district as the entity that is ultimately responsible for providing for students with disabilities.

5. Study of the federal and state special education monitoring systems and their interaction with new state accountability systems. This study relied on interviews at the federal, state and local levels, document reviews and review of the extant literature.

The findings of this study were reported in the Center Issue Brief, *State Accountability Systems*

and Students with Disabilities.

- State accountability systems are changing in two ways. They are evolving toward a focus on student outcomes and programs improvement that includes all student populations. They are also changing from evaluation through checklists and "spot checks" to a process of reviewing district and school plans and outcome data.

- The chief way that students with disabilities have been included in the new general education accountability systems is through the inclusion of their test scores in school and district reports. However, this is very inconsistent from district to district and state to state.

- As states incorporate diverse students and programs into general education accountability, they are trying to incorporate special education accountability as well. A majority of the states include a review of programs and services for students with disabilities in their accreditation reviews.

- Special education is included in states accountability programs through: (1) coordinated monitoring, and (2) integrated monitoring.

- The federal government is trying to coordinate its compliance review of federal categorical programs. Federal compliance is designed to: encourage states to conduct joint planning among the programs; provide technical assistance as opposed to merely citing the state for compliance violations, and foster ongoing, cooperative relationships (Hoff, 1996).

- The number one goal cited by federal compliance monitors was improving outcomes for students with disabilities.

- There have been a number of changes in federal compliance monitoring. These include:
  - conducting a series of outreach meetings around the state for information exchange to help federal monitors shape what areas to focus on with stakeholders from individual states.
  - conducting meetings with OSEP project directors in the state.
  - greater coordination with OSEP between the monitoring staff and the staff that award and monitor grants in the states.

- State compliance staff feel pulled by federal compliance requirements when a state significantly collapses special education monitoring items into a more general, performance-oriented state format.

- New graduation requirements are raising concern for parents, teachers and students.

- Special education staff are concerned that there is not enough time to monitor special education in all its required dimensions on coordinated review teams.

- Despite state efforts and reports to the contrary, districts do not perceive special education monitoring as coordinated with other state monitoring efforts. Even when monitors arrive at the district at the same time, they tend to go in different directions after they arrive.

- State department staff cite two reasons for combining special and general education monitoring: (1) greater integration and inclusion, and (2) to compensate for personnel shortages at the state level. Advocates and parents are concerned that when monitoring is combined due to personnel shortages that the needs of students with disabilities will actually be buried in the larger system.

- Special educators and families worry about guaranteeing individual entitlement versus group accountability on common standards.

6. "Add on" to the biennial survey conducted by the Council of Chief State School Officers of state education policies and practices. This study added ten questions germane to special education to the biennial survey of state policies and programs conducted by the Council of Chief State School officers in the areas of student attendance and time, instructional program and content standards, school accreditation, and teacher preparation.

The findings of the survey were reported in the Center study, *State Level Policies and Practices: Where are Students with Disabilities?* (1997).

- Fourteen states have policies that address year-round schooling. Of those, the Hawaii and Oklahoma policies also address extended school year services for students with disabilities or special needs.

- Thirty five states responded that content standards will apply to students with disabilities. Nine states noted that content standards would not apply to students with IEPs. An additional four states clarified their policies.
  - In Iowa the application of content standards is a local decision
  - In Pennsylvania and Maine, students with IEPs will be required to master content standards "to the extent able."
  - In Alaska, the application of content standards to students with disabilities is voluntary.

- Of the states in which content standards will apply to students with disabilities, seventeen reported that all standards will apply to students with mild disabilities. Seventeen replied

that deciding which standards will apply will be dependent on the students' IEPs.

- Of thirty responding states, twelve reported that students with severe disabilities will be expected to meet all content standards while eighteen reported that standards will be applied dependent upon the IEP of the individual student with severe disabilities.

- In 38 states, state graduation requirements apply to student with disabilities: in 18 states students with mild disabilities are required to meet all graduation requirements. In 12 states, the local IEP committee may determine graduation requirements for students with mild disabilities. In Iowa and Massachusetts, graduation requirements may be waived locally.

- In nine states all graduation requirements apply to students with severe disabilities. In an additional sixteen states, graduation requirements may be determined or waived by the IEP team.

- Two states provide certificates of completion for students with severe disabilities.

- 73 percent of the responding states have an accreditation process that includes a review of programs or services for students with disabilities. The substance of the review of programs and services for students with disabilities tends to focus upon teacher certification data or regulatory compliance.

- Ten of the responding forty four states do not include service for students with disabilities in their accreditation process.

- 54 percent of the responding states required all elementary teachers to complete a course related to teaching students with disabilities for state licensure.

- Of the thirty six states that require separate middle grade teacher certification, 50 percent require candidates to complete a course related to teaching students with disabilities for state licensure.

- 48 percent of the responding states required all secondary teachers to complete a course related to teaching students with disabilities for state licensure.

- 70 percent of responding jurisdictions that maintain authority to approve how an institution of higher education prepares teacher candidates, include evaluation of "how an institution prepares all teacher candidates for teaching students with disabilities."

- Over 87 percent of the responding states currently include teaching students with disabilities in their teacher licensure standards and competencies. However, the content and scope of the standards varies significantly among the respondents.

- Fewer than 22 percent of the responding states currently require teaching students with disabilities as a component of a candidate's student teaching experience.

- While 41 states administer state level written certification exams, only two states, Illinois and Texas, include information about teaching students with disabilities in the written examination.

- Although nearly all states require some continuing professional development for all teachers, only one state, Kansas, currently requires continued education for all teachers in the area of teaching students with disabilities.

7. National survey of directors of special education with a special focus on large districts. This national survey of local special education directors was designed to investigate further district-level policy information related to standards-based reform and students with disabilities. The survey addressed six topical areas: (1) special education governance; (2) district level demographic data; (3) staffing patterns; (4) academic content standards; (5) assessment; and (6) district outcome standards and accountability policies. While the first three areas were designed to describe the survey sample, the three remaining areas were designed to learn about individual district's policies related to three key elements of standards-based reform: standards, assessments, and accountability.

The results of the survey were not publicly disseminated. The survey had a very low response rate (24 percent). In addition to the low response rate, through personal contacts to encourage survey responses, it became apparent that special education directors were often not able to respond to several items in the survey related to general reforms in their district. Hence, the researchers, in consultation with the Center's Advisory Board, determined that it would irresponsible to release the survey data to the general public.

Due to the low response rate of the overall survey, a special attempt was made to target the nation's 100 largest school districts with a shorter, abbreviated version of the survey. This survey was conducted via telephone with some of the information gathered through district documents and information about the district published on the Website. Unfortunately, despite repeated attempts, this survey also had a low response rate. Again, it was the judgement of the researchers in consultation with the Center's Advisory Board, that the survey results could not be released publicly.

Findings related to the *process* of conducting the survey, as reported in *Education Reform Policies and Student with Disabilities: Report o f the National Survey* (2000) include:

- A significant challenge for survey respondents was the fact that the survey requested both special and general education data/information.

- When the survey was designed, researchers presumed that special education directors would and should know about their district's policies in broad reform areas. Special education directors often could not respond to questions pertaining to standards, assessments, or reporting requirements. They either had someone else respond to those questions or left those questions blank.

- The general education information was specialized in the area of assessment. Often no one recipient had all of the necessary information to respond to the entire survey.

8. Classroom- and student-level study of students' inclusion in standards-based reform at the elementary and middle school level. This study is the second phase of investigation into five high-reform districts conducted over a four year period. The first phase of investigation focused on developing case studies of each district's reform activities (see study #3 above). This study focused more specifically on teachers and classrooms. The study is based on site visits to four districts during the 1997-98 school year. Researchers observed classrooms and interviewed special and general education teachers and principals.

Findings from this study were reported in the Center monograph *Reform for EVERY Learner: Teachers' Views on Standards and Students with Disabilities* (2000).

- Teachers who had been involved in writing standards and designing assessments felt a greater degree of ownership for the standards than those who did not participate in the development of standards and assessments.

- Professional development that focused specifically on translating standards into classroom instruction was the most influential factor cited by teachers in implementing the reforms.

- Teachers are very concerned about getting all students to meet the new standards. While teachers engaged in aggressive reteaching sessions with individual students, they did not feel that they could slow down the pace of instruction.

- Teachers cited their colleagues as their chief support for new ideas for lessons and for help with student who were having difficulties. Resources needed for this support included time to meet and mutual trust.

- Deciding what to teach students with disabilities has been drastically altered. Both general and special educators look to the assessments and the larger performance expectations set by the curricular standards to guide what happens in the classroom.

- Special education teachers view their job as "catching up" students with disabilities into the curricula.

- Special education teachers were concerned about the lack of basic skills among their students and felt that those skills should be mastered before attempting more complex material.

- General education teachers generally accepted the responsibility for instruction for students who were working fairly close to the general curriculum. The general education teacher did not assume responsibility for students whose instruction was significantly modified, rather the goal of general education placement was seen primarily as social.

- The school and classroom contexts that promoted inclusion of students with disabilities into the reform were similar to those that have been identified in inclusive schools – time for teacher communication, joint professional development across general and special education teachers, and an expectation that all students will participate in reforms and have higher achievement.

- Teachers generally believe that all students were expected to have access to the general curriculum. But what exactly is meant by access varies among schools and teachers.

9. Cross-case study of the effect of the standards movement on secondary students with disabilities. This study used pragmatic evaluation strategies to explore the extent to which students with disabilities are included in standards-based reform and what factors impact their inclusion at the high school level. The study included site visits to ten high schools in six districts, in three states, ranging from rural to urban communities. In addition to conducting interviews on site, researchers observed classrooms, reviewed documents and attended building meetings, when appropriate.

The findings of this study were reported in the Center monograph, *Reforming High School Learning: The Effect of the Standards Movement on Secondary Students with Disabilities* (2000).

- There is a lack of interaction between district and school-based reform efforts and special education programs and policies.

- Several factors associated with traditional high school organization – the department structure, subject matter focus, lack of professional development opportunities, credit and graduation requirements and course scheduling – impede the ability of students with disabilities to access the standards-based reforms.

- Few general education teachers actually applied the new standards to actual classroom instruction.

- General education teachers varied in how they engaged students with disabilities in standards-based instruction.

- Students with disabilities who were educated in the general education classroom were exposed to standards-based instruction more often than those who were educated in special education environments. However, exposure did not necessarily mean that the students were more engaged in the instructional processes.

- A limited number of special education teachers used the standards as a guide in special education environments.

- Special education teachers tended to use the IEPs rather than the standards as a guide for instruction. Moreover, most IEPs are not aligned with the standards.

- Neither general or special education teachers were aware of or perceived any formal personal consequences if a student fails to learn standards.

- The motivation for helping students with disabilities learn the standards was largely personally driven by individual teachers. There was no school-wide belief, vision or motivation for including these students.

- District- and statewide assessment, not the standards themselves, were what motivated teachers to help *all* students learn the standards.

- Districts and schools lacked explicit decision criteria for determining the extent to which students with disabilities participated in standards-based instruction and large-scale assessment.

- Both general and special educators had a "wait and see" attitude about engaging students with disabilities in standards.

- Most educators and administrators *articulated* that student with disabilities are best served in a standards-based curriculum in general education. However, they also believed that some students cannot learn those standards.

- Most schools in this study were more likely to offer a life skills curriculum for students with disabilities except for those with mild learning disabilities and speech and language impairments.

- Special education teachers were generally less aware of standards than general education teachers.

- Both general and special education teachers lacked the ability to link pedagogy, standards and content.

- General educators lacked an understanding about instructional modifications and

accommodations for students with disabilities.

- While special educators knew more than general educators about modifications and accommodations, they did not have a working knowledge of how to accommodate instructional and learning modifications for standards.
- Special educators lacked guidance about how to align IEPs with the standards.
- There was a dearth of district- and school-wide professional development for both general and special educators regarding application of the standards-based instruction in the classroom and implications for students with disabilities.
- Teachers assumed leadership roles and often were catalysts for change in reform initiatives.
- The departmental structure in high schools inhibited collaboration between general and special education teachers.
- Both special and general education teachers lacked the knowledge and skills to co-teach in a classroom.
- General educators tended to view special educators as lacking the knowledge and qualifications to teach content subjects in high school.
- Special education teachers, by and large, were not invited to departmental meetings and were not involved in school-wide discussions about standards.
- External inclusion initiatives developed whole school and teacher capacity for collaboration between general and special education teachers to include students with disabilities in standards.
- All teachers reported that they needed time to reflect on the standards and their implications for students with disabilities.
- General education teachers lacked in-class support to accommodate students with disabilities. When special education teachers were assigned to co-teach with general educators they were perceived, and functioned, as classroom aides.
- Turnover in district and school leadership restricted and limited sustained reform.
- Most leaders did not have a vision for including students with disabilities in standards-based reform.

- District and school leaders *articulated* support for including students with disabilities in reform, however, they often did not provide support and resources for teachers to do so.

- Those school leaders who do have an institutional vision for including all students in an standards-based curriculum clearly articulated and supported that vision.

- Some parental and community attitudes run counter to including students with disabilities in standards-based reform.

- There were few service delivery models in the high schools that could support the inclusion of students with disabilities in standards.

- Large classes in high school, with diverse student needs, created a significant challenge to teachers trying to teach the standards.

- Large high schools inhibited the ability of teachers from different departments to communicate, collaborate, reach a consensus, and develop strategies to engage all students in a standards-based curriculum. Conversely, small or rural high schools offered more opportunities for teachers to communicate and collaborate but had limited course offerings and resources to engage students with disabilities in standards.

10. Descriptive synthesis of district special education directors' perspectives on reform. This study is based on a sub-sample of eighteen special education directors whose districts were selected for a larger study for their activism in school improvement and standards-based reform. The study is based on interviews with the special education directors. Respondents were asked a series of questions on four topics: major changes in special education programs and policies; inclusion of students with disabilities in general education reform; support and technical assistance; and major issues facing their program.

While the study was completed and reported in the Center publication *Reauthorization of IDEA: Views from the Field* (2000) the findings were not publicly disseminated for several reasons. First, the interviews took place after IDEA had been reauthorized but before the new regulations were released to implement the law. Therefore, many districts took a "wait and see" attitude toward the policy changes. Second, give the nature of the sample of special education directors, i.e., special education directors from exemplary districts, the findings are not representative of the field at the time. Third the data were entirely based on the interviews of individual directors and were not triangulated with any other data from the districts or state. Finally, the district responses need to be considered in the context of state policy. However, the study only explored reaction to federal law and did not explicitly inquire about the influence of state policy on the practices and policies of local districts. Given these concerns, the findings are not related in this report.

Implications for Practice, Policy and Future Research

The studies undertaken by the Center yielded a number of implications for how to further the inclusion of students with disabilities in standards-based reform. Below is a review of the key conclusions of each study.

- The reauthorization of IDEA has institutionalized the concept of including students with disabilities in the regular classroom and in general education assessment. Teachers, in general, agree that the change is worthwhile.

- To be successful with all students, the standards-based education reform movement needs the involvement of people who represent the full range of diversity of the children in our schools. Questions about the purpose of schooling must be specifically addressed as they relate to the scope of state standards as well as IEPs

- It appears that standards-based reform, as it presently exists, may be a necessary but not sufficient push toward improving local school practices.

- States need to look more closely at the issue of student diversity (of which disability is just one element) if they are to really understand what it will take for all students to reach standards.

- Pressures of cost containment and student diversity seem to be the prevailing influences on local educational initiatives, rather than the state paradigm of standards-based reform.

- There needs to be consistent decision-making processes outlined for making decisions about how to include students with disabilities in standards and assessments and there should be accountability for these decisions.

- Teachers of students with disabilities need to be made aware of the connection between standards, assessment, and accountability and the daily content and structure of their instruction.

- The purpose of state accountability policies is to ensure adequate student learning for all students in the state. Monitoring, accreditation, and assessment information is useless unless coupled with a system of technical assistance and support.

- Continued efforts should be make to develop compliance monitoring that supports program improvement and student achievement.

- There are a number of inconsistencies in state policies. Overall, state policies governing standards, graduation requirements, and school accreditation are including references to students with disabilities. Other policy areas such as supervised teaching experiences,

and professional development for recertification, generally do not include students with disabilities.

- Individual states have very diverse special education infrastructures. This diversity can make it difficult to access and disseminate information and may be a barrier to effectively implementing federally driven policy initiatives.

- There is still not a clear, collective understanding of what "access to the curriculum" means.

- Overall, professional development for general and special education teachers to develop a mutual understanding of standards and curricula and how diverse students learn is woefully inadequate.

- Many of the issues facing students with disabilities are related to broader inadequacies in the teaching and learning environment. This is particularly the case in high schools.

- Districts and states need to clarify who specifically is responsible for educating students with disabilities in charter schools.

- The assumption with charter schools is that the student attends the school that matches his/her curricular needs. Practically, the risk is that if charter or choice options dominate in a district, there could be a group of students for whom no school is a good match.

Each of these major findings has implications for further research. Some of the issues are currently being explored further through OSEP- and other U.S. Department of Education-funded efforts. For instance, both OSEP and the Office of Education Research and Improvement (OERI) have undertaken other studies related to charter schools and students with disabilities. The OSEP-funded National Center on Educational Outcomes as well as the National Assessment Governing Board continue to explore issues associated with national and state assessment and students with disabilities. And, a current major competition funded by OSEP has its priority to "study the role of special education and children with disabilities in educational policy reform, specifically initiatives designed to improve student performance through increased accountability."

However, there are significant findings from the Center that deserve further OSEP consideration. For instance, as documented in several of the studies, there remains a great deal of ambivalence among policymakers and practitioners over the fundamental purpose of schooling, despite the new standards. This creates ambiguity in the specific curriculum and programmatic decisions that are made for students with disabilities. Several studies point to the pressures that classroom teachers and building and district administrators feel with respect to teaching an increasingly diverse student body, of which disability is but one element of diversity. While the Center has studied the dearth of training for diverse learning styles, further study is needed to document

precisely those types of in-service training that teachers feel are beneficial in helping them teach the standards to a diverse group of students. Finally, there are very few studies that specifically address the unique culture and structure of high schools as they relate to students with disabilities from a standard curriculum perspective. Most secondary special education research focuses on transition and vocational preparation rather than the student's experience in the academic curriculum.

Dissemination Products and Activities

The Center developed a number of products for dissemination and disseminated the findings from its studies in a variety of formats. Below is a listing of the Center's products and activities.

Publications, book chapters, articles
The following publications were published by the National Association of State Boards of Education

Issue Briefs

"Standards-Based School Reform and Students with Disabilities," June 1996.

"Charter School and Students with Disabilities," November 1996.

"State Accountability Systems and Students with Disabilities," October 1997.

Policy Update

" Inclusion of Students with Disabilities," October 1994.

"Special Education Discipline," April 1995.

"The Treatment of Special Education in Charter School Legislation," November 1996.

"Students with Disabilities and High School Graduation Policies," March 1997.

"Charter School and Students with Disabilities," June 1998.

"IDEA Regulations," July 1999.

"Eligibility for Alternate Assessment for Students with Disabilities," April 2000.

"Technology and Students with Disabilities"

Monographs

"What Will It Take: *Standards-Based Reform for All Students,*" November 1996.

"State Level Policies and Practices: *Where are Students with Disabilities?*" March 1997.

"Snapshots of Reform: *How Five Local Districts Are Interpreting Standards-Based Reform for Students with Disabilities,*" September 1998.

"The Push and Pull of Standards-Based Reform: *How Does It Affect Local School Districts and Students with Disabilities?*" 1998.

"Reform for EVERY Learner: *Teachers' Views on Standards and Students with Disabilities,*" May 2000.

Reforming High School Learning: *The Effect of the Standards Movement on Secondary Students with Disabilities,*" May 2000.

"Is This Mainstream Yet? State Education Policy Designs for All Students," May 2000.

Journal Articles and Book Chapters

"The Inclusion of Students with disabilities in School Reform and Restructuring: An Analysis of Five Local School Districts," Inclusive Schooling: National and International Perspectives, edited by Stanley Vitello and Dennis Mithaug, 1998.

McLaughlin, Nolet, Rhim and Henderson "Integrating Standards: Including all Students" Teaching Exceptional Children, 1998.

Goertz, M.; McLaughlin, M..; Roach, V. and Raber, S "What Will It Take: Including Students with Disabilities in Standard-Based Reform." Chapter in the 1997 Yearbook of the American Education Finance Association Eds. Chambers, Jay and Parish, Thomas. CA: Sage Publications, 1998.

"Charter Schools in Colorado and their Response to the Education of Students with Disabilities" Journal of Special Education, 1997.

Roach, V. and Dailey, Don "Including Students with Disabilities in State and Local Assessments," In Assessing Student Learning: New Rules, New Realities. Arlington, VA: Educational Research Service, 1998.

"Achieving better results Through Access to the 'General Education Curriculum': What Does it Mean?" Teaching Exceptional Children, 1997.

Roach, V. "State Accountability Systems and Students with Disabilities." Twentieth Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Washington, D.C.: US Department of Education, 1998.

Roach, Virginia "Supporting Inclusion: Beyond the Rhetoric," Phi Delta Kappan 4 (December 1995): 295-299.

Newsletter Articles

"NASBE Heads New Policy Research Center on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform" in The State Board Connection, Spring 1995.

"Special Ed Study" in School Board News, 27 June 1995.

"Parents Play Key Role in National Study on Inclusion" in The Special Edge, July/August 1995.

"Charter Schools: *What We Know about Special Education*" in CASE Newsletter, Fall 1995.

"Center to Study Reforms' Impacts on Students, Programs" in Counterpoint, Fall 1995.

"Special Education and General Education Reform: *How Does Nebraska Compare to National Education Policy Trends*" in Nebraska Journal of Special Education , Summer 1996.

"School-based Management : *Where is Special Education?*" The School Administrator, Winter 1996/1997.

"State-Level Policies and Practices: *Where are Students With Disabilities?*" CASE Newsletter, 1996.

"Standards-Based Reform and Students with Disabilities. Counterpoint, 1996

"WRRC sponsors Education Reform Seminar for State Education Agency Directors" in RRFC LINKS, Spring 1996.

Papers Presented at Conferences

"*Educational Reform in 18 States: Implications for Special Education*" at the 1995 NASDSE Annual Conference, Salt Lake City, Utah.

"*Creating Unified Systems: What is the Research Telling Us?*" at the 1995 CASE Public Policy Conference, Phoenix, Arizona.

"Standards-Based Reform and its Impact on Students At-Risk" at the Year Connections Working Group, NICHEY, Washington, D.C.

"Four State Briefing: First Year Findings of the Four State Case Studies" at the 1995 NASBE Annual Conference, Pittsburgh, PA.

"Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform" at the 1996 CEC Annual Convention, Orlando, Florida.

"A Comparative Analysis of the Educational Reforms in England and Whales and the United States: Can We Create Inclusive Systems?" at the 1996 CEC Annual Convention, Orlando, Florida.

"Center for Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform: Preliminary Findings and Emerging Issues" at the Western Regional Resource Center State Education Agency Directors' Seminar, (January 1996) Reno, NV.

"A Comparative Analysis of the Educational Reforms in England and Whales and the United States: Implications for Creating Inclusive Systems" at the 1996 AERA Conference, New York, NY.

"Charter Schools: A Hopeful Response to the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Colorado" at the 1996 AERA Conference, New York, NY.

*"State Level Reforms in Education: District Response and Implications for Special Education"*at the 1996 AERA Conference, New York, NY.

"Reform for All? General and Special Education Reforms in Five Local School Districts," American Education Research Association Annual Meeting Chicago, IL, March 1997

"State Level Reforms in Education: District Response and Implications for Special Education" Cross-Site Analysis Based on Four Case Studies, Annual Meeting of the American Association of Educational Research Chicago, IL March 26, 1997

"The Impact of Educational Reform on Special Education Policy at the State Level" 1996 AREA Conference, New York, NY

"Promoting Full Access for All: Five Local School Districts' Experiences," Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) Annual Conference, March 1997

"Charter School and Students with Disabilities: Colorado's Experiences," Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Annual Convention, April 1997, Salt lake City, Utah.

"Is This the Main Stream Yet? State Education Policy Designs for All Students" at the 19th Annual Research Conference of the Association for Policy Analysis and Management, Washington D.C., November 1997.

"Standards and Students with Disabilities," to the Education Trust, Washington D.C., 1999.

OERI briefing on the Center's research, Washington D.C., 1999.

"Overview of special education policy,"at the National Conference of State Legislatures Annual Meeting in November, 1999.

"Blended Resources at the Local Level: An Analysis of 5 Case Studies," based on its Year 3 technical report and monograph, presented at the American Educational research Association Annual Meeting in April, 1999.

Other Conference Presentations

"The Politics of Urban School Reform: An Analysis of Privatization's Failure in Baltimore City Public Schools." Poster session given at 1996 AERA Conference, New York, NY.

"Governing Special Education from the Schools: Involving Special Education in Site-based Management and School Improvement Planning." Poster session given at 1996 AERA Conference, New York, NY.

"Students with Disabilities and Content, Performance and Opportunity to Learn Standards," PEER Teleconference

"Preliminary Findings of NASBE's Cross-Site Analysis of Local District Response to State Educational Reform": National Association of State Directors of Special Education, New Orleans, LA

UM presented data from the charter school case study at the National Charter School Policy summit, Denver CO

UM presented five local case studies at the Rutgers Invitational Symposium in education on Inclusive Schooling: National and International Perceptive , April 1997

NASBE presented findings related to including students in state accountability systems to the National Education Goals Panel, 1999.

Center findings presented at an AED roundtable symposium as part of OSEP's Eighth Annual Technical Assistance and Dissemination Conference, 1999.

"Center Findings," presented to The NASBE Study Group on Educational Accountability. Additionally, NASBE presented Dr. Goertz's work on Title I (the paper, "Is This the Mainstream Yet?") to the same study group, 1999.

"Governing Special Education from the Schools: Involving Special Education in Site-based Management and School Improvement Planning."

Charts and Matrices for other OSEP - Funded Projects

Chart of publication schedules and requirements. (1995) Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Boards of Education.

"Governing Special Education from the Schools: Involving Special Education in Site-based Management and School Improvement Planning."

NASBE will continue to distribute the monographs and issue briefs through its Publications Division which advertises through the NASBE web site, the NASBE journal *The State Education Standard*, and its publications catalogue and "800" number.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The prior section discuss the major findings of the Center and areas for further research. Furthermore, the *Purpose and Goals* section of this report discusses several issues encountered by the Center, in both its organization, misson from OSEP, research methodologies and research topics. Those will not be repeated here. This section will discuss five major conclusions and recommendations on a broader level, taking a five year view of the research findings, the changes in policy context that have occurred over the past five years, and the structure of the Center work, given the original priorities of OSEP.

#1: Despite efforts to the contrary, special education and general education are still very separate.

This conclusion is substantiated through several aspects of the work of the Center. First, the apparent separation of general and special education was a consistent finding throughout the studies, regardless of whether they were case studies, reviews of the extant literature or surveys. Despite notable efforts to bring the two fields together through the standards process, this finding persisted through the studies that were conducted as late as 1999. Second, the inability of local special education directors to complete survey questions that probed for their district's major assessment policies points to how isolated the work of those directors has been with respect to the major initiative of the district. Third, the Center's own inability to effectively add special education investigation to the existing CPRE study points to the splintered service delivery for special education that is taking place in classrooms across the country.

It is still important to investigate the impact of general and special education reform on students with disabilities. However, given the separate nature of the two fields, blending special education policy research with general education policy research is likely to yield inadequate results– only part of the picture may be illuminated through such methods. *It may be more fruitful for special education policy research to parallel general education policy research in timing, sample, and methodology*. At the federal level, this would require a joint research endeavor of OSEP and OERI. Given the critical issues regarding teacher development identified in the Center's studies, teacher professional development might prove a point of common research across the two offices in the Department.

#2 The Center undertook its work at a "cusp" time in federal policy. Although it was not intended, the schedule of federal reauthorization, the promulgation of regulations, and other waivers that allow states to delay the implementation of federal law meant that many of the changes expected in states and districts did not happen within the timeline of the Center.

The original Request for Proposal from OSEP and discussions with Department staff had identified the reauthoriztaion of IDEA as a key point of investigation. However, as noted in the *Context* section, the law was not reauthorized until 1997, after highly contentious deliberations. Given the contention in the reauthorization and the delay in the promulgation of the rules, many states and districts took a "wait and see" posture to IDEA 97. As a result, many of the impacts of IDEA which need to be studied will not be evidenced in the local districts until 2000 and beyond.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act was reauthorized on schedule in 1994. However, the implementation timeline for some of the significant changes in the law, coupled by a liberal waiver policy provided to the states due to a federal interest in flexibility, gave states a significant amount of leeway to simply do nothing. While the Center was scheduled to investigate changes in Title I due to the 1994 reauthorization in 1996, it quickly became clear in the interviews that many states had not made significant changes. Furthermore, state Title I directors had no plans to significantly change their programs until 1999 and beyond.

Because of the delayed implementation of federal law, the findings of the Center – particularly with respect to assessment – may no longer be as germane as they were four years ago and earlier. These findings merit further investigation and revision as some of the issues have changed, such as large numbers of exclusions from standardized testing, while others remain, such as the dearth of training for IEP teams for determining who is in and out of the standardized testing. Overall, there have been significant shifts in policy, and yet delays in policy implementation and filtering federal policy to the local level make for a mixed picture of the impact of federal policy. *There is a need for continuously examining federal policies and their impacts. This is not purely a cyclical phenomenon, but rather a pattern of continuous shifts and adjustments at different levels in the system and at different rates, even among districts and schools. The Center's findings must be viewed in this light.*

#3 There are marked differences in the degree to which standards-based reform is

implemented across schools. There are marked differences in the degree to which students with disabilities are included in standards-based reform.

The Center divided its investigation into schools and districts that were considered exemplary versus schools and districts that were considered "average" or struggling. Both types of investigation have merit. However, the studies of exemplary schools and districts did, indeed, render different findings than the studies of average schools. There is a need to analyze commonalities and differences in findings from exemplary schools to "run of the mill" schools. While exemplary schools demonstrate the potential of the system to implement standards-based reform for students with disabilities, it is the thorny issues present in the average schools that will provide clues as to how to "scale up" the reform for all students, in all schools. OSEP should consider further comparative studies of the average versus the superb to explore implementation of federal special education policy initiatives.

#4 There is a need to consolidate the work of the Center and other federal efforts even while OSEP looks to future areas for investigation.

As was noted in the *Project Activities* section, the Center undertook ten separate studies throughout its five years of existence. While the findings from those studies are summarized in this report, there has been no systematic analysis of the studies to cull out common themes and trends across the studies. The Center was not funded to undertake such an activity. In addition, subsequent OSEP funding priorities do not provide an opportunity to undertake such as analysis. *Given the level of investment in the Center (more than $2.5 million over five years), OSEP may wish to explore the possibility of supporting Center cross-study analysis along with analysis of other related policy studies that have been undertaken in the past five to seven years.*

#5 OSEP needs to continue to search for methods to encourage collaboration among its funded research.

The original concerns of OSEP regarding coordination and data burden for states and districts is still germane. States are inundated with requests to complete surveys and participate in studies. Some projects are currently experiencing a backlash toward researchers – they are electing not to participate in studies. If OSEP wants collaboration among its funded projects, then it cannot use the requirement in just one project as leverage to force collaboration. *OSEP needs to take into consideration a variety of research issues when fostering (or requiring) collaboration among projects. These include timing of the studies, the timelines and nature of deliverables, and the methodologies utilized by various projects. In addition, collaboration must be a mutual requirement for projects to compel projects to work together.*

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